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MYTHS AND REALITY IN SCHOOL BOARD RESEARCH.

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RESEARCH TO TEST A MODEL WHICH CORRELATES THE TYPES OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND THE COMMUNITY POWER STRUCTURE WITH THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IS PRESENTED. INTERVIEWERS GATHERED DATA FROM 23 BOARDS OF EDUCATION IN NEW YORK. THREE PROFESSIONAL JUDGES INDEPENDENTLY CLASSIFIED EACH BOARD ACCORDING TO THE FOLLOWING THREE-PART MODEL--(1) THE COMMUNITY POWER STRUCTURE WAS EITHER DOMINATED (ELITE), FACTIONAL, PLURALISTIC, OR INERT, (2) THE SCHOOL BOARDS WERE EITHER DOMINATED, FACTIONAL, STATUS CONGRUENT, OR SANCTIONING, AND (3) THE ROLE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT WAS EITHER SERVANT, POLITICAL MANIPULATOR, PROFESSIONAL ADVISER, OR DECISION MAKER. THE DATA SHOW THAT A BOARD OF EDUCATION EXHIBITS THE SAME TYPE OF POWER STRUCTURE AS ITS COMMUNITY, AND THE SUPERINTENDENT'S ROLE IS A DIRECT FUNCTION OF BOTH. A DOMINATED COMMUNITY STRUCTURE RESULTS IN A DOMINATED BOARD WHICH CAUSES THE SUPERINTENDENT TO ASSUME THE ROLE OF SERVANT. THIS MODEL IS HELPFUL IN ANALYZING THE FOLLOWING CAUSATIONS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS--(1) DOMINATED BOARDS TURN TO ONE MEMBER FOR DECISIONS, (2) FACTIONAL BOARDS DEPEND UPON THE MAJORITY FOR DECISIONS, (3) STATUS CONGRUENT BOARDS DEPEND UPON EXTENSIVE DISCUSSION, AND (4) SANCTIONING BOARDS DEPEND UPON THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE SUPERINTENDENT. AN INTERVIEWER REPORT OF ONE OF THE 23 BOARDS OF EDUCATION STUDIED IS APPENDED. THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED FOR PRESENTATION AT THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (CHICAGO, FEBRUARY 17, 1966). (GB)

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MYTHS AND REALITY IN SCHOOL BOARD RESEARCH*

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The general purpose of the research reported here is to test a model which classifies the types of school leadership and the community power structure with relation to the system of public education. School leadership and community power relations are crucial in understanding such problems as the high turnover of school superintendents, the morale of teachers, the initiation of long range experimental programs in the school, and the effectiveness of the school in achieving its manifest purpose.

Although the tactics of the educational system are primarily in the hands of teachers and principals, and further back, the schools of education, the strategy of education lies elsewhere. Superintendents play various roles in the longer range planning for the educational enterprise which may greatly facilitate or set rigid limits within which teachers and principals may operate. Curriculum planning, criteria in recruiting, and personnel considerations are almost exclusively the domain of the superintendent. How bold a program in these areas may be depends, however, partly on the way in which the superintendent influences and is influenced by the supporting community. Within the community, there are variations in the way leaders and power figures influence the superintendent, and these variations are believed to strongly influence the effectiveness of the school system itself.

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There is perhaps no set of sociological variables more fundamental to the school system than those dealing with social power. Power is defined as the ability to determine the behavior of others, even against their wishes. Thus, it is through the exercise of power relationships by community leaders that schools and school personnel are limited in aims and educational methodology. It is further assumed that the role of the superintendent, as it is actually played, is primarily a matter of integrating the interests of the power structure with those of accepted educational practice of personnel in the school and interpreting the position of each to the other. This is a difficult assignment. It is the view of the present writer that the power structure with which the superintendent must deal is neither as simple nor as uniform as the most popular case studies in sociology and political science might lead one to believe. Rather, the power structure is viewed as varying from one community to another. Further, it is believed that this variation in power structure has definite implications both for the structure of the school and for the role of the superintendent.

Sociological literature abounds in a concept of the power structure which is often called the "elite power model" but which I shall call the <u>dominated power structure</u>. This concept holds that the power structure of the community is a pyramid, with a few or even one man at the top. In matters of "big policy," the power structure directs the course of events in the community. This model of power has been criticized in terms of the requirements of proof, but it may be accepted that at least some communities follow this pattern in leadership relations. Important for the present study design, however, is the possibility of the existence of other types of power structures.

Obviously, the "elite power model" does not allow for conflict between sides of relatively even strength. Yet, there is much evidence that such a situation

exists in many communities. The present author, in a previous study, found not only relatively even sides, but the appearance of characteristics of power within each faction similar to those in the single elite power model in the dominated community. This type I shall call the factional power structure.

There is also a considerable amount of evidence that some communities follow neither the dominated nor the factional power model. Rather, the power structure is pluralistic or diffused, with many poles of power. Presumably, there is no single power structure which must be reckoned with for any situation. This I shall call the pluralistic power structure. Power and community interest exist and the superintendent is not free to run the schools as he sees fit, but the power is not overwhelming. It is merely that in the hearts of many laymen there burns a certain generalized suspicion of professionals; this is particularly true in education where nearly everyone considers himself qualified to comment on teaching and learning.

A fourth type of structure may be found, especially among small rural communities. This type of community exhibits no active power structure, although for our purposes all that is required is that the community exert no active power relations with regard to school matters. I shall call this the inert power structure.

Boards of Education in these communities described variously above exhibit the same type of structure which is found in the community power structure. The dominated power structure results in a dominated board. Board members are nominated because they will "take advice." For major issues, board members conform through the mechanisms of control employed by the power elite. In the community in which the factional power structure is found, a factional school board will also be found. Voting is more important than discussion in board meetings, and the majority faction always wins.

In the community with a pluralistic power structure, school board members may often represent "interests," but there is no overall theme of power influence. Therefore, it is in this type of community where school board members will be active but not rigidly bound to one position. Discussion, often before a motion, is of utmost importance. Board members treat each other as colleagues and are free to act as a group. I shall call this type of board the status congruent school board.

In the community with the inert power structure, the school board is inactive and has no reinforcement in philosophy from the community. The board is dominated by the superintendent himself as an expert. I shall call this board the sanctioning board.

Now let us bring this constructed model to the problem of superintendents. There are certain patterns of behavior which, logically, the superintendent must exhibit, and which may be generalized as follows:

In the dominated community and board, the superintendent must play the role of servant; he "takes advice," does not "rock the boat," and he must carry out the more important desires of the dominating power clique. In the factional community and board, the superintendent must work with the majority, but since these communities often change majorities, he must be careful that he does not become identified with one faction too closely. In other words, he must be a political manipulator. In the community with a pluralistic power structure and a status congruent board, the superintendent is expected to give professional advice, based on the best educational research and theory. The board is active but open-minded. He is a professional adviser.

In the community with the inert power structure and the sanctioning board, the superintendent "calls the shots" and the board becomes merely a "rubber stamp." In this case the role of the superintendent is that of decision-maker.

The model may be summarized as follows:

Community Power Structure	School Board	Role of the Superintendent
Dominated	Dominated	Servant
Factional	Factional	Political Manipulator
Pluralistic	Status Congruent	Professional Advisor
Inert	Sanctioning	Decision-Maker

Research Design and Description of Sample

Boards of education as units are the subject of this study. Individual board members represent component parts. The sample consists of twenty-three boards of education located throughout the State of New York. The semi-standardized interview was used as the data gathering device. The data were collected as part of the school board study of the Regents Advisory Committee on Educational Leadership.

The interviewers were people with experience as members of boards of education as well as socially skillful. Interviewers were given training in the process and techniques of interviewing by people experienced in the field and were paid for their work.

The material on each board was assembled in a standard format and presented to each of three judges.[1] These judges independently classified each board in terms of the operational definitions provided.

Findings[2]

Table I illustrates the extent to which boards of education of different types tend to employ different patterns of decision making in important issues.

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[1] See Appendix.

[2] For a more detailed analysis of these data see Joseph R. Sproule, "Decision Making Processes of Boards of Education" (unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1966).

The limited number of cases per board type precludes any possibility of representative generalizations. However, in terms of the sample included in this particular investigation it is clear that the vehicle which Status Congruent boards of education utilize most frequently to reach consensus is extensive discussion. It is equally clear that consensus in Factional boards of education is greatly dependent upon the power of the majority. The single Dominated board most frequently turns to one member who leads the others directly to agreement. Two out of three Sanctioning boards depend upon the recommendation of its chief school officer for decisions. Residual boards tend to discuss matters until a suitable compromise has been reached.

Since this investigation did identify different patterns of school board decision-making and variations in the involvement of the chief school officer, the use of the model is helpful in analyzing the decision-making process of boards of education. Ten boards were identified as Status Congruent, five as Factional, one as Dominated and three as Sanctioning.

It also seems that on the basis of this inquiry, the model might be extended to include a fifth category. In this presentation of data the label Residual was used to identify this fifth board type. This was determined originally as a result of the inability of the three judges to categorize these four boards as any one of the four board types described in the model. Actually, the term Residual may be an inappropriate one since the protocols seem to point to a board type which is in a period of transition from one board type to another. For example, three of the four boards labeled Residual seemed to each of the three independent judges to be somewhere between a Status Congruent and Sanctioning board type. Each board was a growing suburban community which has evolved out of what was an agriculturally based economy. Historically, their decision-making

Table I

PATTERN OF DECISION-MAKING MOST FREQUENTLY USED,
BY BOARD TYPE, FREQUENCY, AND PER CENT

Pattern	Status Congruent				Factional				Dominated				Sanctioning				Residual				Total			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
A	10					1	2	2		1			1	2			3	1			14	5	2	2
B			1	9		1	3	1	1						3					4	1	1	4	7
C			9	1	5						1				3			1	3		5	1	16	1
D		10				3		2				1		2	1		1	2	1		3	16	1	3
TOTAL	10	10	10	10	5	5	5	5	1	1	1	1	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	23	23	23	23

A = When a difference of opinion develops, the matter is discussed at length. Before the discussion ends, a formula is found that everyone agrees to and then everyone votes for it.

B = One board member convinces the group and brings them around to what he thinks is the proper decision.

C = It comes down to a vote and it's settled by a majority. The disagreement is not ironed out.

D = The chief school officer's recommendation is followed.

1 = most frequently

2 = second most frequently

3 = third most frequently

4 = fourth most frequently

process was dominated by the chief school officer. However, this was becoming a thing of the past as the economy and board representation changed. There seemed to be a leveling of the chief school officer's disproportionate share of the decision-making power and a greater concern for the plurality of thought represented by the new breed of school board members. However, it seemed evident that the administrator-board relationship had not stabilized to the point where the decision-making process represented either the Status Congruent or Sanctioning board types.

APPENDIX I

A STUDY OF COMMUNITY FACTORS IN THE TURNOVER OF SUPERINTENDENTS

Interviewer Report on the Swarthmore-Haverford School District

The Swarthmore-Haverford district is comprised of the communities of Swarthmore, population 270, and Haverford, population 177. These two communities are located seven miles apart in a rural area. The farms in this area, according to the superintendent, average 220 acres. The district was consolidated in 1960; the high school is located in Swarthmore, the elementary school in Haverford. The present superintendent, Mr. Kennedy, has been with the school district since consolidation, although the previous superintendent of the former Swarthmore district initiated and pushed through the consolidation. The former superintendent of Haverford applied for the new position of superintendent of the consolidated district but was passed over in favor of Kennedy. The former Swarthmore superintendent did not apply for the position but moved on to university graduate work. He was highly respected by the Swarthmore community.

I. The Community Classified

A. The interviewing team rejects the dominant classification because:

1. There is no main industry except farming, although there are a few strong farm-service type businessmen.
2. No single strong figure or group was identified through the interviews. No group or man seems to consistently influence any local policy.
3. No strong formal organizations are present in the community.
4. Interviews with board members indicate that there is no consistent or strong external influence or interest in board activity.

B. The team rejects the factional classification because:

1. No rural-town split was evident.

2. There is no apparent antagonism between Swarthmore and Haverford regarding educational policies. Most respondents regard the relationship as one of cooperation rather than conflict.

C. The team rejects the pluralistic classification because:

1. The respondents indicate that, in general, the community respects the superintendent and value his recommendations highly.

2. The community is generally Republican and/or conservative, although politics do not enter into school board elections. Campaigns are never hotly contested.

D. Therefore, the team accepts the inert classification because:

1. The respondents indicate that it is difficult to get people to run for the school board.

2. Only one board recommendation since consolidation, a bond issue, has been rejected by the community. The respondents blame the defeat at the polls on general apathy regarding building needs and a reluctance to accept a tax rate increase, plus a rainy election day. Although one possible power figure, a businessman from Swarthmore, Mr. Hunter, was identified, he was not actively concerned with educational policy or board activities, so far as we could determine. He was actively opposed to the bond issue and may have influenced the vote. This was, however, a matter of taxes rather than educational policy.

3. No apparent active community interest in educational policies

was evident nor was there any active interest in the board's or superintendent's activities.

II. Board Classification

A. The team rejects the dominated board classification because:

1. No connections nor consultations between the board members and local power figures were indicated, nor is there any particularly strong or influential board member.
2. There is no evidence of board members being indorsed or nominated by any individual, group, or power figures.

B. The team rejects the factional board classification because:

1. Although membership is made up of three each from the two towns, there was no evidence of voting on issues along town lines.
2. Votes were almost always unanimous.
3. The board is characterized by long-range stability and cooperation and changes in membership seldom affect board operation.
4. There seem to be no preconceived viewpoints prior to actually voting on issues. Discussion concerning issues is the rule rather than the exception.

C. The team rejects the status-congruent classification because:

1. Although the board is characterized by discussion and the members seem to regard each other as colleagues, the superintendent's recommendations and policies have seldom been rejected. The board looks to him for leadership.
2. Board membership changes through voluntary resignation

rather than through defeat at the polls.

3. Issues are resolved through unanimous vote.

4. There is a general reluctance to accept candidacy in the community for membership on the board. Members do not seem to represent any particular viewpoints or community interests.

5. The general feeling seems to be "What's best for the school system," which apparently is defined by the superintendent.

D. Therefore, the team accepts the sanctioning board classification because:

1. The respondents consistently indicate that the board looks to the superintendent for leadership and accepts his recommendations.

2. There is no strong leadership on the board, including the chairman.

3. The superintendent indicated that the board has accepted 90 percent of his proposals over the past five years.

4. The board does not consult with community leaders but rather tends to turn to the superintendent for guidance, information and leadership.

III. Superintendent Classification

A. The team rejects the servant classification because:

1. His recommendations are accepted 90 percent of the time by the board, according to his statement, which seems to be supported by board statements.

2. He does not consult with community leaders to any great extent.

B. The team rejects the political manipulator classification because:

1. There are no apparent factions to manipulate and he does not consult with board members informally.

C. The team rejects the professional advisor classification because:

1. His statement that there are only a few special meetings and in many cases there is no point in calling these people in on every little detail.
2. The board seems to value his professional knowledge highly and seldom deviates from his proposals.

D. Therefore, the team accepts the decision-maker classification because:

1. He indicates that most proposals are carefully laid out by himself and his staff prior to their presentation to the board.
2. Once again, 90 percent of his proposals were accepted by the board.
3. At least one board member indicated dissatisfaction with a particular policy (introduction of the "new" math method) but he nevertheless voted for it.
4. The superintendent states "No problems with my board," and that he has a "Utopian situation" and "I'm very fortunate."
5. He does not consistently consult with the community leaders.

General Remarks

In summary, the team has classified the community as inert, at least in terms of educational policy, the board as a sanctioning board, and the superintendent as a decision-maker. In general and regarding the model, there might be some indication of a status-congruent board with a professional advisor as superintendent, although the community is definitely inert, because of the large amount of discussion over issues by the board and because opinions are apparently changed in that process. The superintendent does offer a good deal of advice without demanding concurrence. However, he does get his way. The interview team agrees that this is not enough to classify the board as status-congruent with a professional advisor.

One interviewer does question the role of the superintendent as a decision-maker rather than as a professional advisor on the basis of his indicated concern with laying groundwork prior to presenting a proposal. A more careful and systematic analysis of the tapes may bear this out.